

Stock route review—improving the management and use of the stock route network

Queensland's stock route network is an important part of the state's droving and pastoral industries, and also possesses precious connectivity and environmental values.

The importance of these values and the need to update the management and use of the network has led to a review, undertaken by a panel of stock route users and managers.

A series of recommendations, including a proposed new fee structure, were released in July 2008 by the then Minister for Natural Resources and Water.

A regulatory impact statement (RIS), released in August 2009, outlines the proposed fee structure. A copy of the RIS is available on the DERM website <www.derm.qld.gov.au>.

The Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) sought public feedback on the proposed structure.

Submissions closed on 19 October 2009.

Background to the review

During the severe drought in 2002–03 Queensland's stock route network experienced high levels of use. As a result a number of operational and policy issues were brought to the attention of the department.

This occurred at the same time the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* was introduced, which established the Land Protection Council (LPC) to advise the Minister on pest and stock route management issues.

In March 2007 the then Minister approved for a series of high-level recommendations, which were provided by the LPC, to be implemented. At the same time, the Queensland Government adopted the Queensland Stock Route Network Management Strategy 2006–09.

The strategy was developed following community consultation and included scope for improvements to existing management frameworks.

The Stock Route Assessment Panel (SRAP) was subsequently established to advise the Minister on implementing the LPC recommendations within the scope of the strategy. The SRAP includes representatives from AgForce Queensland, the Droving and Stock Routes Association, the Local Government Association of Queensland and the LPC. The SRAP will continue to inform the policy reform process and be

expanded to include conservation and Indigenous representatives.

Stand-alone stock route network management legislation is proposed to simplify and streamline the administration of stock route activities.

Reforms

Along with the proposed fee structure, the SRAP provided a series of recommended reforms aimed at improving the management and use of the stock route network. These were released for comment in July 2008.

The government considered feedback from the community before approving a suite of reforms to incorporate into proposed new stock route network management legislation. Information on the reforms is included in the RIS. The key reforms are summarised below.

Reclassifying the stock route network

The existing stock route network will be retained but reclassified 'active' or 'inactive' based on recent and expected usage patterns, to allow for more active management and better allocation of resources.

Active stock routes are those that are either regularly used by travelling stock or ensure the connectivity and integrity of the network. Inactive stock routes are those not considered essential for travelling stock.

The reclassification of stock routes will occur following a public consultation process, and be based on stock route retention criteria. This process will occur regularly to respond to the changing needs of the pastoral industry and management of the network.

Revising the travel and agistment permit structures

Permits

A contemporary permit and fee framework will:

- support the principle that the network is primarily for use by travelling stock
- reflect the user pays principle and the level of benefit gained from the activity
- offset stock route network management costs.

Two types of permits—travel and slow travel—will be available, with priority given to travel permits over slow travel permits. Slow travel permits will only be issued

when pasture and other resources are in surplus to the needs of travelling stock.

Also included in this framework is a harvesting permit, for use on inactive areas of the network only, and will include a fee, which reflects the level of benefit gained.

Fees (refer to the RIS for detailed fee information)

It is proposed that travel fees be introduced to better reflect the level of benefit gained by the user and provide local government with revenue to assist in offsetting their management costs. Measures to promote voluntary compliance with permit conditions will be introduced as well as penalty rates for non-compliance.

Timeframes

Timeframes for submitting and issuing applications will be introduced to allow stock route users and managers sufficient time to plan for, and process permit applications.

For an application to be eligible for assessment it must be received by the local government five working days prior to the arrival of stock. Local government is responsible for assessing the application and providing a decision within five working days of receipt.

Issuing short-term emergency agistment permits

Given the stock route network is not a drought-relief tool, short-term agistment permits will be issued for emergencies only (excluding drought).

Emergency agistment permits will be issued for a maximum of 28 days on the inactive network, and a maximum of 14 days on the active network, as priority on the active network rests with travelling stock. Only one emergency agistment permit may be issued to an applicant within a three month period.

Annual Grazing Agreements

Annual Grazing Agreements (AGA) will be used to regulate static grazing on the stock route network. AGAs have been developed taking into account other recommendations including:

- pursuing a user pays system
- aiming for cost-neutral local government management
- providing single agency administration of the stock route network and other relevant lands.

AGAs will be applied in the following ways:

- granted by application over a fenced part of the inactive stock route network for the purposes of grazing stock
- declared over unfenced parts of the stock route network that are enclosed within a property and being grazed—to afford a level of protection to the land by regulating and conditioning current unregulated use

- issued by local government in lieu of permits issued by DERM under the *Land Act 1994*.

A single entity to issue permits to occupy

Local government will assume responsibility for issuing all permissions to travel and agist the stock route network. Under this system:

- existing permits to occupy will be transferred to AGAs within one year from the commencement of the new legislation.
- where an AGA is issued in replacement of a permit on the active network, the AGA will terminate after five years
- there will be no static grazing allowed under an AGA or permit on the fenced, active network, five years after commencement of the proposed new legislation.

Local government can refuse to renew AGAs should conditions be breached or the requirements of both static and travelling stock cannot be maintained.

Ownership of stock route water infrastructure

Due to the financial burden that would be incurred by local government, the ownership of water facilities located on the stock route network will remain with DERM.

The legislative requirement for local government to maintain water facilities on the inactive network will be removed, however the requirement to maintain the facilities on the active network will remain.

Further information

Further information about Queensland's stock route network or the review findings is available on the DERM website <www.derm.qld.gov.au> or by emailing <stockrouterereview@derm.qld.gov.au>.

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